

Israel and Gaza

I strongly believe that both the Israelis and Palestinians should be committed to finding non-violent solutions to resolve their differences. I believe the settlements-and the continued military presence in areas where settlers have pulled out-function as yet another source of agitation and conflict in a region already saturated with both.

I believe that encouraging peaceful solutions to the current conflict is crucial to any change in what has been an unhappy and tortured status quo. I have long sought to gain as much knowledge about the region as possible, and I make it a matter of personal interest to learn about the Middle East on a first-hand basis. Below you can see pictures and video of my recent trips to the region.

Speaking with people in the region, one of the concerns that has been expressed has to do with the impact of repeated rocket attacks on Israeli cities and the legitimate need to do something to stop those attacks. I have unequivocally condemned such attacks and continue to do so. They are unacceptable and must cease. So too, hate speech, calls for the destruction of Israel, and anti-Semitism must not be tolerated wherever it occurs.

However, the rocketing from Gaza doesn't necessarily mean that any response, regardless of scope, target or impact on civilians, is necessarily justified, moral or strategically prudent. This kind of misleading duality itself reflects the thinking, on both sides, that can make peace so hard to achieve and violence so easy to justify. The fact is, there were and are many alternative responses possible and it is a false dichotomy to suggest, as some have, that if one criticizes the actions taken by Israel in Gaza and the West Bank then one is necessarily ignoring the rocket attacks from Gaza or somehow siding with or enabling terrorists.

In my judgment what has happened in Gaza and what goes on in the West Bank every day endangers U.S. integrity and security and ultimately strengthens hard line extremists at the expense of moderates and to the detriment of long term Israeli security. I also believe, having traveled and met with people throughout the region, that this adverse effect is not confined to Palestine but extends to varying degrees throughout the Islamic world and beyond.

I understand that people may disagree strongly with this perspective, but I am certainly not alone in expressing it. Many people have contacted my office to convey support for what we have said about our visit and this includes many friends of Israel

within our own country.

February 14-19, 2009

CODEL Members: Brian Baird, Keith Ellison (D-MN)

[See Pictures from the trip](#)

[Read Brian's Press Release About the Trip](#)

[Video of Brian Interviewing A Doctor at Augusta Victoria Hospital](#)

[Video of Brian Interviewing Mental Health Professionals in Gaza](#)

[Video of Brian Interviewing a Psychiatrist in Sderot](#)

[Video of Brian Interviewing a Resident in Sderot](#)

[Video of Brian Interviewing the Principal of the Only American School in Gaza](#)

[Video of Brian and Congressman Ellison Discussing Life in Gaza with Residents](#)

[Read an Op-Ed written by Brian and Congressman Ellison About Their Trip and the Policy Changes They hope to See](#)

May 22-29, 2009

CODEL Members: Brian Baird, Donna Edwards (D-MD), Peter Welch (D-VT)

[Full Itinerary](#)

[Video of Brian Interviewing a UN Relief Worker in Gaza](#)

[Video of Brian Interviewing a Retired American Soldier, Now Doing Relief Work in the Region](#)